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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001061

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH PERSEVERES DESPITE DIFFICULTIES

REF: A. TASHKENT 830

[1](#)B. TASHKENT 1010

Classified By: CDA BRAD HANSON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During a week-long visit to Uzbekistan, Human Rights Watch (HRW) Europe and Central Asia Division Executive Director Holly Cartner met with Charge and Acting DCM on June [1](#)1. Cartner, who was joined by outgoing HRW Uzbekistan Country Director Andrea Berg, discussed HRW's difficulties in acquiring long-term visas and accreditation for staff; described recent meetings with Uzbek officials; provided updates on the Umida Niyazova and Gulbahor Turayeva cases; and explained staffing changes at HRW's Tashkent office. Cartner assured Charge that HRW will make every effort to remain in Tashkent. The less confrontational tone of HRW's meetings with GOU officials is a positive sign, but its survival in Uzbekistan will ultimately be determined by whether Uzbekistan will grant long-term visas and accreditation. End Summary.

ONLY SHORT-TERM VISAS AND ACCREDIATION GRANTED  
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[1](#)2. (C) On June 1, during a week-long visit to Uzbekistan, Human Rights Watch (HRW) Europe and Central Asia Division Executive Director Holly Cartner met with Charge and Acting DCM. She was joined by HRW's outgoing Tashkent office director Andrea Berg. After a wait of several months, the Government provided Cartner, an AmCit who is based at HRW headquarters in New York, with a week-long, single entry Uzbek visa in April. Berg explained that Cartner received her visa at about the same time that Berg's accreditation was renewed for three months after initially being rejected, and an AmCit HRW Assistant received a three-month visa following a year-long wait (ref A). Since all three events occurred after lengthy delays and only shortly before the EU's decision to renew sanctions against Uzbekistan, Cartner viewed them as part of a last-minute effort by the Uzbeks to convince the EU to lift sanctions, rather than as any sign of support for HRW's work. The Government has not issued HRW expatriate staff long-term visas or accreditation. The HRW Assistant's visa will expire at the end of July, and she is still waiting for accreditation. This assistant is an American citizen.

Four Meetings with GOU Officials  
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[1](#)2. (C) Cartner met with Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov, Deputy Justice Minister Pulat Samatov, Oliy Majlis

(Parliament) Human Rights Ombudsman Sayyora Rashidova, and National Center for Human Rights Director Akmal Saidov. Though the meetings did not produce tangible results, for the most part, Cartner described their tone as less hostile than she had expected. For example, Samatov acknowledged that HRW's alleged failure to register its logo with the Justice Ministry was a relatively minor violation. Saidov, in contrast, took an aggressive tone and accused HRW of biased reporting. However, Cartner felt that Saidov's behavior was partly theater, as he was friendly with them once their official business had been concluded. HRW also requested meetings with the General Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but these requests were denied.

#### Umida Niyazova and Gulbahor Turayeva Updates

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13. (C) Berg provided updates on former HRW employee Umida Niyazova and imprisoned Andijon-based human rights activist Gulbahor Turayeva. Berg said that since Niyazova's release on supervised probation on May 8, she has effectively been under house arrest and subjected to both official and unofficial restrictions. Officially, Niyazova must return home by 10:00 each night, but unofficially she must avoid contact with HRW, foreign citizens and Embassies. Berg reported that Niyazova is in good health and has been reunited with her son. HRW has occasionally contacted Niyazova to monitor her condition, but has avoided regular contact. Berg said that Andijon eyewitness Gulbahor Turayeva, who was convicted and sentenced to six years' imprisonment on April 24, is still awaiting an appeal. Berg said that the Government announced on May 27 that Turayeva's appeal was now postponed indefinitely. Her appeal was originally scheduled for May 22 in Andijon (ref B).

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#### Staff Changes at HRW's Office

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15. (C) Cartner said HRW will make every effort to keep its Tashkent office open. As was earlier announced, Berg stepped down as HRW Country Director and left Uzbekistan on June 1. She will eventually move to Bishkek to work as a HRW Central Asia analyst. HRW has begun the search for a new Country Director and seeks to fill the position by September. In the interim, HRW's Tashkent office will be augmented by two temporary employees: George Gogia, who is already in Tashkent, and HRW Moscow Office Deputy Director Alex Petrov, who will arrive in July. As the two are citizens of Georgia and Russia respectively, they do not need Uzbek visas. HRW AmCit Assistant in Tashkent will not serve as interim country director.

Comment: Can't Live With It, Can't Live Without It

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16. (C) On the surface, given the abundant mixed messages from the Government, it may seem as though Uzbekistan cannot decide whether it wants the organization to stay or leave. However, there may be some method to the Uzbek tactics. The Government understands the political benefit of allowing Human Rights Watch to continue operating -- as well as the political hazards of shutting it down. At the same time, Uzbek officialdom has done everything in its power to limit HRW's ability to function effectively, including constant surveillance and criminal proceedings against its local employee. As part of its cat-and-mouse game, the Government has studiously avoided officially condemning the organization itself. Its legal action is aimed rather at individuals connected with Human Rights Watch, while attacks against the institution are left to ostensibly "independent" media outlets controlled behind the scenes by the Government. Human Rights Watch will likely survive for the time being, limited in its effectiveness by bureaucratic delays and threats. All the while, Uzbek officials can tell their

Western critics that Human Rights Watch is free to operate in Uzbekistan, as long as its employees obey the law.  
HANSON